

## OVERVIEW

Licensing is a legal process and care must be taken to ensure that applicant/licensee rights are protected. The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) as a child placing agency (CPA) is also responsible for protecting the rights and ensuring the welfare of children placed in foster care. Whenever there is potential conflict between the rights of an applicant or licensed foster home and the rights or safety of children in care, the factors relative to children are to be considered first.

All foster home licensing requires extensive, professional judgment by certifying staff. In those instances where judgment becomes difficult and potential for error is greater than normal, decisions are to be weighted toward protection of children.

Agencies receiving federal funds may not use standards related to income, age, education, family structure, and size or ownership of housing where those standards are arbitrary or exclude groups of prospective parents on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, age, sex, height, weight, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, political beliefs or disabilities, or genetic information.

A foster home applicant or licensed foster parent who has reason to believe that they have been denied or delayed the placement of a child because of race, color, or national origin, religion, age, sex, height, weight, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, political beliefs or disabilities, or genetic information can aggrieve the decision through existing administrative or legal remedies; see [SRM 403, Non-Discrimination in Foster Care and Adoption Placements](#).

MDHHS does not discriminate against any individual or group because of race, religion, age, national origin, color, height, weight, marital status, genetic information, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, political beliefs or disability.

## DEFINITIONS

### ***Child Placing Agency (CPA)***

A child placing agency is a local MDHHS office or a placement foster care agency, licensed by the Division of Child Welfare Licensing (DCWL) to provide child placing foster care activities on behalf of MDHHS.

***Community Awareness***

Printed information, participation in community service programming, and group presentations with content addressing the specific foster care and other special needs of children in need of placement in a geographic area, county or boundaries of a coalition.

***Recruitment***

Information and activities designed to draw the attention of prospective foster parents in designated geographic areas, including print and broadcast media, personal appearances by staff, recruitment and mentoring by licensed foster parents.

***Targeted Recruitment***

Activities targeted to reach a specific group or demographic. Targeted recruitment can also occur when targeting specific neighborhoods or communities.

***Retention***

Activities and information designed to reinforce and maintain interest in fostering for licensed foster parents including training and recreation activities, family support activities, awards, incentives, and recognition banquets.

**PROGRAM  
STATEMENT**

Licensing Rule 400.12302 requires that prior to the beginning of each fiscal year the CPA is to prepare a written program statement that includes the following information:

- Types of foster care provided.
- Age, race, ethnic background, and specific characteristics of children to be served.
- Type and numbers of foster homes needed.
- Types of services provided to foster families.
- Geographic area covered.
- Other categories as appropriate.

This program statement is to be made available to persons making formal inquiry regarding foster home licensure.

This statement, in combination with other documentation, may be used to support a recommendation for denial of application based on “lack of willingness to provide care for the types of children served by the agency.” (Rule 400.12306(2))

**Example:** The prospective foster parent is only willing to care for infants available for adoption.

## FOSTER HOME DEVELOPMENT

### Recruitment and Retention Program

Each CPA must develop and maintain an ongoing recruitment program to ensure an adequate number of suitable foster homes based upon the annual program statement outlined above, characteristics of children needing placement in communities served by the agency, and the identified unique needs of individual children. Each agency must also develop, implement and maintain a program of foster home retention that includes foster parent involvement, identifies the causes for the loss of foster homes and prescribes actions to be taken to retain foster homes. (R400.12304)

Each CPA must participate in the completion of the annual Adoptive and Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention (AFPRR) plan in any county in which they license foster homes. The annual AFPRR plan will be compiled by the local MDHHS office and submitted on behalf of all participating agencies.

MDHHS is committed to ensuring that an adequate number of qualified homes is available to meet the individual needs of the various children entering the foster care system. By strengthening recruitment and retention efforts, considerable benefits will be accomplished for the foster care delivery system. Local MDHHS offices may designate staff for recruitment and retention activities.

### Goals

MDHHS objectives are to:

- Increase the number of inquiries about foster home licensure.
- Increase the number of licensed relative caregivers.

- Increase the percentage of applicants who complete the licensing process.
- Maintain a sufficient number and adequate array of foster homes to meet the needs of children experiencing foster care in Michigan.

## RECRUITMENT EFFORTS

Recruitment efforts should be designed to provide information about the characteristics and needs of children served by the department, the nature of the foster care and adoption processes, and the supports available to foster and adoptive parents throughout the community. Inquiries received as a result of recruitment efforts must be contacted within two business days for follow-up and invited to attend an orientation.

Agencies should analyze and evaluate the racial make-up of children stepping down from a residential placement and be considerate of the communities the agency serves and provide an adequate plan for the recruitment, training, and support to develop foster homes willing and able to take placement of children leaving a residential.

## Comprehensive Recruitment Plan

Each CPA must have a comprehensive recruitment plan that includes:

- A description of the characteristics of children in foster care.
- Specific strategies to reach all parts of the community.
- Diverse methods of disseminating both general and child-specific information.
- Strategies for ensuring that all prospective parents, including relatives, have access to the home study process, including location and hours of service that facilitate access by all members of the community.
- Strategies for training staff to work with diverse cultural, racial, and economic communities.
- Strategies for addressing language barriers.

**Collaborative  
Efforts**

Collaborative efforts are encouraged, including joint efforts with:

- Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative (MYOI) youth and specialists.
- Current and former foster and adoptive parents.
- Regional Resource Team recruiters.
- Volunteer Services.
- Multi-Purpose Collaborative Bodies (MPCBs).
- Public and private partnerships.

Reimbursement may not be made by local offices to placement agencies for training provided to MDHHS foster parents.

**Contracted  
Resources**

Contracted resources may be purchased to work collaboratively on recruiting new foster families and retaining existing foster families. Contracted resources may include individuals, organizations, and agencies. Specific resource efforts may include:

- Community awareness (education) activities.
- Assisting in the development of annual recruitment and retention plans.
- Marketing and advertising strategies.
- Foster parent recognition and retention activities.
- Foster parent training promotion.
- Promoting foster parent recruitment events.

**Recruitment  
Activities**

Effective recruitment plans incorporate a variety of recruitment strategies including community awareness efforts, participation in

community events and creating or participating in targeted recruitment events or activities.

To ensure agencies are mindfully addressing racial disparities in child welfare, all agency AFPRR plans must have activities identified to recruit a sufficient quantity of foster homes to address any racial disparities in foster home availability in the communities served by the agency.

Recruitment activities may include:

- Implementing a county-wide community awareness and recruitment campaign.
- Developing and maintaining ongoing contacts with all levels of the community for purposes of education about foster care in general and the need for particular homes.
- Developing and distributing necessary resource material for community awareness purposes that describe the county's specific recruitment needs, licensing procedures, and requirements.
- Responding to individual inquiries within two business days to ensure that families are receiving prompt and courteous attention in person, by phone, or by email.
- Working collaboratively with the foster care certification staff and Regional Resource Teams in scheduling foster home orientation, preplacement and ongoing training.
- Working jointly and cooperatively with contractual and appropriate community resources to implement coordinated activities outlined in the county's recruitment community awareness and retention plans.
- In addition to entering all inquiries in the appropriate child welfare information system, develop a monitoring document to track the number of phone inquiries and their disposition.
- Tracking responses to community awareness and recruitment efforts and activities.
- Tracking the frequency, participation, and content of foster parent orientation, preplacement and ongoing training on a quarterly (90-day) basis.

- Participating in collaborative activities beyond county boundaries, where appropriate.
- Participating in relevant MDHHS sponsored meetings and trainings.
- Evaluating the effectiveness of customer service throughout the licensing process.
- Identifying steps in the licensing process in relation to the number of prospective foster parents withdrawing at that step.
- Developing ways to enhance the licensing process in the agency to retain more prospective families throughout the process.

### **Foster Parent Recruitment Activities/ Expenditures**

Allowable foster parent recruitment activities or expenditures may include:

- Orientation training and materials, including refreshments.
- Mentoring prospective foster parents.
- Brochures and advertising about the need for foster parents.
- Presentations to community groups for recruitment.
- Family recreational events.
- Table rental or other fees to participate in community events.

### **RETENTION ACTIVITIES**

A program of foster home retention must be developed and implemented that includes the involvement of foster parents and addresses the reasons foster parents close their license. Retention plans should address ways in which each agency supports their foster families.

The agency retention plan should address supports needed for foster families and relative caregivers served by the agency. Additionally, each agency must create a foster family support strategy to develop an adequate array of foster homes to take placement of older youth who have historically been placed in residential due to a lack of available foster homes.

Allowable foster parent retention activities or expenditures may include:

- Ongoing advanced training topics for licensed foster parents.
- Regional training.
- Annual recognition events.
- Support groups.
- Educational library in child welfare offices-foster care related periodicals, videos, and books.
- Family recreation events.
- Mentoring of licensed foster parents.
- Annual regional training conferences for adoptive parents, foster parents and relative caregivers.
- Reimbursement to foster parents and adoptive parents for costs of attending authorized training such as mileage, meals, and day care at state rates.
- Speaker fees for recognition events, conferences and training.

## FOSTER PARENT ORIENTATION, PREPLACEMENT AND ONGOING TRAINING

Training is defined as the presentation of information to prospective or licensed foster parents designed to meet various licensing rule requirements, reinforce and enhance competencies and skills. The training process begins with an inquiry from the prospective foster parent.

All CPAs must provide orientation and additional ongoing training for **each** prospective and licensed foster parent as referenced in their annual foster parent training plan. Training may be delivered at the local office level or coordinated with other counties and agencies with similar needs, sometimes referred to as foster parent training coalitions. Foster parent training may be delivered by MDHHS staff, Placement Agency Foster Care (PAFC) staff or in conjunction with available community resources. It is the



responsibility of the licensing agency to ensure that trainers are appropriately trained and credentialed to deliver the proposed material.

## ORIENTATION

The purpose of orientation is to provide information to prospective applicants and not to obtain information from them. At the end of orientation, if the individual(s) indicates a willingness to care for the types of children served by the agency and wants an application for licensure, the Foster Home Licensing Application must be provided.

Orientation may be provided individually to inquiries rather than in a group.

Prior to completing and submitting an application for an original foster home license, each prospective applicant, including relative caregivers who are applying for licensure, must attend an orientation session. If there are more than one caregiver in the home, each caregiver must attend an orientation session. The purpose of orientation is to provide individuals with enough information to make an informed decision regarding whether to proceed with applying for a foster home license. It also gives prospective families an idea of the availability and types of supports and resources provided by the agency. Orientation should be thought of as an extension of the recruitment process.

Inquiring families should not have to wait more than 14 business days from the date of their inquiry to be able to attend an orientation.

There are no specific requirements in the CPA rules or the foster home rules regarding the number of hours of orientation. However, the following topics must be covered:

- Purpose of foster care.
- Characteristics and needs of the children in foster care.
- Attachment and separation issues.
- Impact of fostering on the family.
- Role of the foster family.
- Licensing process.
- Grievance procedures.
- Importance of a child's family.
- Parent and sibling visits.
- Department foster care policies and procedures.
- Department foster care parent training requirements.

## Pre-Licensure Training

- Supportive services and resources.
- Provisions of the children's ombudsman act.
- Provisions of the child protection law.
- Foster Care Review Board's role.

The purpose of pre-licensure training is to provide prospective foster parents with the initial skills needed to work with children placed in their home. Some of the topics that were covered in a broad way during orientation will be covered in greater detail, as the focus of the training changes from assisting individuals with making a decision about applying for a foster home license to increasing their base of knowledge needed to work with children in foster care.

**Note:** Pre-licensure training is intended to give families a base line of understanding about the needs of children in foster care and children who are adopted from the child welfare system. This baseline knowledge should be built upon through ongoing training opportunities.

After the foster home licensing application has been signed and returned to the agency, the agency is to begin the initial licensing process. The required pre-licensure training program is the GROW curriculum. The training is organized around four competencies:

- Grow culturally responsive relationships.
- Recognize children's developmental needs and the impact of trauma.
- Obtain information and resources.
- Work in partnership with families to support healthy relationships.

The goal of the GROW pre-service training curriculum is to prepare foster, adoptive, and kinship parents to establish culturally responsive relationships with infants, children, and youth in foster care, with attention to the impacts of trauma exposure and developmental needs; and to develop co-parenting relationships with birth families that support the future relational health of all infants, children, and youth.

The GROW curriculum includes the following modules that must be completed prior to licensure:

- Introduction.
- Child and Adolescent Development.
- Attachment and Relationships.
- Toxic Stress and Trauma.
- Wellbeing.
- Diversity and Inclusion.
- Child Mental Health and Special Needs.
- Advocacy and Systems.
- Panel-Foster Care or Relative.
- Conclusion.

Relatives pursuing licensure need to complete the following sessions before obtaining their licensure:

- Kinship panel.
- Introduction.
- Child and adolescent development.
- Attachment.
- Systems, policy, and advocacy.
- Safe Sleep.
- Prudent Parenting.
- Toxic stress, trauma, and trauma-informed parenting.

All remaining sessions of GROW must be completed within the first six months post-licensure.

A relative caregiver's inability to complete training requirements should not delay licensure. Staff should request a variance for relative caregivers who are unable to meet the training requirements.

The training program must be conducted by the local Regional Resource Team. To refer a prospective family for GROW training, the licensing worker should complete the MDHHS-5853, GROW Training Referral, and email it to the appropriate Regional Resource Team mailbox.

If a family cannot attend the GROW training sessions the licensing agency can request an exception to be able to train the family individually. The agency should email the MDHHS-5749, GROW Training Referral Exception Request to [Recruitment and Retention Mailbox](#) for approval.

## ONGOING TRAINING

Ongoing training is any training that is offered after the initial orientation and pre-licensure training. Each CPA is required to have an annual training plan. The annual training plan is to cover the period of October 1 through September 30, coinciding with the fiscal year. This information should be included on the annual AFPRR plan. Each foster parent is required to obtain at least six hours of training per calendar year. The purpose of ongoing training is to ensure that foster parents have the necessary skills and information to meet the needs of children placed in their homes. The requirements are the same for all licensed providers, including licensed relatives. The licensing agency must thoroughly assess licensed foster parents to determine appropriate training needs each year.

### Training Topics

CPA licensing rule 400.12312 specifies topics that must be included in training received by foster parents from orientation through the first 30 months of licensure. The initial foster home study and all subsequent annual and renewal studies must contain a section that assesses the training needs of individual foster parents. The required topics may be prioritized based on the identified needs of the foster parent.

Training topics that must be covered within the first 30 months are:

- Characteristics and needs of children.
- Effective parenting.
- Behavior management.
- Importance of maintaining family connections for a child placed in foster care.
- The role of the agency.
- Emergency procedures and fire safety.
- Preparation of the child in foster care for independence.
- CPR and First Aid.

Additional topics that should be addressed are:

- The rights and responsibilities of foster parents and the agency.
- Supportive services available to children and foster families.
- Working with the child's family.
- The agency's role in supporting and monitoring the functioning of foster parents.
- Assisting children in transitioning to adoptive or other permanent placements.
- Requirements of the Multiethnic Placement Act and Interethnic Adoption Provisions (MEPA/IEP) and cultural sensitivity.
- Other relevant topics determined by the agency.

## ASSESSMENT OF TRAINING NEEDS

There must be an assessment of the training needs of individual foster parents at the time of the original home study and at each annual assessment of the family. (Rule 400.12316(4) and R400.12313(2)(c)). The assessment of training needs must be documented in the foster home certification file. Agencies should help families locate needed trainings and facilitate the family attending the identified trainings.

The factors to be considered in assessing for training needs are:

- The strengths and weaknesses of the entire family.
- The number, characteristics, and types of children to be placed in the family.
- Prior experience of the foster family in caring for children similar to those who might be placed into their home.
- Skills and knowledge that will improve the ability of the family to meet the needs of children already placed in their home.
- Other specific topics may be required based on the assessment of the individual licensee.

## FUNDING & EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT GUIDELINES

### Foster Parents and Trainers

Travel costs for foster, adoptive families and trainers attending the training must comply with current MDHHS travel guidelines. Each agency is financially responsible for these reimbursements.

Participants in approved activities may be reimbursed at current state rates for qualifying meals. Meals included as part of the training package are subject to state travel regulations.

Childcare is reimbursed at a maximum rate of \$2.50 per hour per foster child. Group care provided on the training premises is reimbursable at the same rate.

Mileage is reimbursable at the published State Standardized rate.

### Unallowable Expenses

Funds for foster home recruitment and retention may not be used to enhance or supplant foster care funding to support youth placements or adoptive and foster parent, relative or guardian expenses of care. Additional **unallowable** purchases include:

- The development or maintenance of logos or web sites for coalitions or groups.
- MDHHS or CPA administrative costs related to retention or recruitment activities.
- Attorney fees.
- Acquisition of vehicles, equipment, and furniture.
- Home improvements or any reimbursement to foster parents, CPAs or youth for the costs related to youth care.
- Payments to CPAs for retention and recruitment activities that may reasonably be considered to be included in their administrative rate to fulfill their contractual obligations including general public awareness activities, attendance at

community events, preparation of church bulletin, development of recruitment materials, provision of training, newspaper advertising, public service announcements, provision of foster care orientation.

- Purchases prohibited by the Governor or MDHHS administration.
- Flowers or gifts for families, with the exception of an annual appreciation gift not to exceed \$35 per foster parent.

### Allocations

Allocation of funds is made to Business Service Centers for distribution to local offices as appropriate. Regional offices may approve changes to activities identified on the AFPRR plans, allocate funds to their counties and may shift funds between their counties.

### LICENSING TIME FRAMES

The foster homes licensing process should be facilitated in a thorough and expedient manner. Foster home licensing should occur within 180 days of receipt of a signed application from a prospective family. Agencies are responsible for ensuring their customer service delivery is adequate to achieve timely licensure.

### POLICY CONTACT

Questions about this policy item may be directed to [Recruitment and Retention Mailbox](#).